

Chapter 15 Communications

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Radio Communications

Radio communications provide for the flow of tactical information needed for the command/control of personnel and resources.

Policy

Agency specific policies for radio communications may be found in:

- *Department of Interior, Department Manual, Radio Communications Handbook (377 DM).*
- *USDA Forest Service Handbook (FSH 6609.14 chapters 10-40 and Forest Service Manual (FSM) 6600 Systems Management Chapter 6640 - Telecommunications.*

Radio Contracts

For information on contracts, software, [hardware requirements and approved radios](#). [Contact your agency Telecommunications Department or the NIFC Communications Duty Officer at \(208\) 387-5644.](#)

- [BLM - For information on BLM contracts, software, and hardware requirements and approved radios, contact the National Radio Communications Division \(NRCD\) at \(208\) 387-5830.](#)

Dispatch Recording Devices

- [BLM - Recording devices will be used by BLM dispatch offices or any interagency office dispatching BLM resources.](#)

Radio Frequency Management

- FM frequency assignments for normal operations or initial attack ~~ground~~ operations are made on a permanent basis and are requested through the state office. ISO frequency manager to the Washington Office frequency manager.
- [Do not use any frequency without proper authorization from the authorized radio frequency management personnel at the local, state, regional or national level.](#)
- The NIFC Communications Duty Officer (CDO) coordinates and assigns incident frequencies at the national level. ~~They~~[The CDO](#) will also [request the GACC to](#) assign Communications Coordinators (COMC) when necessary to support specific geographic areas. See the *National Mobilization Guide* for additional information.
- Mutual-aid agreements for frequency sharing can be made at the local level.
- A mutual-aid frequency sharing agreement is valid only in the specific locale it originates in. These agreements do not authorize the use of a shared frequency in any other area. NIFC national fire frequencies are not to be used for these agreements.

- 1 • ~~Do not use a frequency unless authorized to do so by communications~~
2 ~~personnel at the local, state, regional or national level.~~
- 3 • Initial attack AM air operations frequencies will be assigned by the NIFC
4 CDO and FM air operations frequencies will be facilitated/assigned by the
5 NIFC CDO. These assignments will be on an interagency basis and
6 coordinated with the GACCs.
- 7 • On Type 1 or 2 incidents, the Communications Unit Leader (COML) will
8 request, assign, and report all frequencies used on the incident to the NIFC
9 CDO/COMC. This ~~would include~~includes the request and assignment of
10 aircraft frequencies. The ICS-205 and ICS-220 are always a part of the
11 Incident Action Plan (IAP) and distributed at ~~every~~the operational period
12 briefing.
- 13 • The COML will contact the NIFC CDO, or the COMC if assigned, for
14 additional FM and AM frequencies. Requests for aviation frequencies will
15 be placed through established ordering channels, through NICC ~~and will, to~~
16 be filled by the NIFC CDO or COMC. COML's will ensure that the host
17 agency Aviation Dispatcher and the NIFC CDO or COMC ~~has~~have the
18 current ICS-220 for their incident.
- 19 • Incidents that do not have an assigned COML will coordinate and request
20 all additional frequency and communication equipment needs through the
21 NIFC CDO and/or the COMC.
- 22 • Frequencies for Type 1 and Type 2 incidents are assigned through the
23 National Interagency Incident Communications Division (NIICD) located at
24 NIFC. The CDO is responsible for this function.
- 25 • ~~During severe situations and/or~~ When there are significant numbers of large
26 incidents additional frequencies can be assigned. These assignments are
27 temporary ~~assignments~~, and are requested by the NIFC CDO from the
28 Washington Office (Spectrum) managers and given by the CDO to the
29 incident. This applies to frequencies for command, ground tactical, and
30 aviation operations.
- 31 • Additional frequencies are provided in the following circumstances:
32 ➤ The NIICD national frequencies are all committed within a specific
33 geographic area.
34 ➤ The requests continue for frequencies to support new incidents within a
35 specific complex.
36 ➤ The fire danger rating is extreme and the potential for additional new
37 incidents is high.
- 38
- 39 **Pre-assigned National Frequencies**
- 40 National Air Guard - 168. ~~6256250~~ MHz - A National Interagency Air Guard
41 frequency for government aircraft will be used for emergency aviation
42 communications. Continuous monitoring of this frequency in narrowband mode
43 is mandatory by agency dispatch centers. Transmitters on this frequency must

1 be equipped with an encoder on 110.9 Hz. 168.6256250 is restricted to the
2 following use:

- 3 • Air-to-air emergency contact and coordination.
- 4 • Ground-to-air emergency contact.
- 5 • Initial call, recall, and re-direction of aircraft when no other contact
6 frequency is available.

7
8 **National Flight Following - 168.6506500 MHz**

9 The National ~~Interagency Air Net~~ Flight Following Frequency is used to monitor
10 interagency and contract aircraft. This frequency is used for flight following of
11 official aircraft. ~~The intent flying point to point; and is not to use this frequency~~
12 ~~for intended to be used during mission flights or~~ incident operations. All
13 dispatch centers/offices will monitor the national flight following frequency at all
14 times. Transmitters on this frequency must be equipped with an encoder on
15 110.9- Hz. ~~168.650~~ This frequency is restricted to the following use:

- 16 • Flight following, dispatch, and/or re-direction of aircraft.
- 17 • Air-to-ground and ground-to-air administrative traffic.
- 18 • Not authorized for ground-to-ground traffic.

19
20 **National Interagency Air Tactics - 166.6756750 MHz, 167.9509500 MHz,**
21 **169.1501500 MHz, 169.2002000 MHz, 170.0000000 MHz**

- 22 • ~~These~~ frequencies used to support air-to-air or ground-to-air
23 communications on incidents west of the 95th meridian. These frequencies
24 shall be used for air-to-air and ground-to-air communications only.
25 ➤ ~~Exception: Pacific Southwest Geographic Area: 166.675 MHz, 169.150~~
26 ~~MHz, and 169.200 MHz will be used for air to air only; 170.000 MHz~~
27 ~~will be used for ground to air only.~~
- 28 • ~~Interagency geographic area coordination centers assign these frequencies.~~
29 ~~Assignment must be coordinated through the NIFC CDO.~~
- 30 • Transmitter power output of radios installed in aircraft operating on these
31 frequencies shall be limited to 10 watts. Base stations and repeaters are
32 prohibited on these frequencies.
- 33
34 • ~~Base stations and repeaters are prohibited on~~ These frequencies will be
35 assigned by the NIFC CDO/COMC or in coordination with the local unit if
36 a National Telecommunications and Information Administration Radio
37 Frequency Authorization (NTIA-RFA) is in effect.

38
39 **National Interagency Airtanker Base Frequency Initial Call - 123.9759750**
40 **MHz**

41 ~~The national interagency~~ This frequency is assigned by the FAA to all airtanker
42 bases (unless otherwise notified) for ~~their~~ exclusive use. ~~No other use outside~~
43 is restricted to a radius of 40 nautical miles and 10,000 feet MSL from the
44 coordinates of the airtanker bases-base. No other use is authorized.

45

National Government All-Call Frequencies - 163.1001000 MHz and 168.3503500 MHz

~~For use anywhere, anytime. They are good choices as travel~~ These frequencies ~~for strike teams moving between assignments. They are available for ground tactical~~ are used on a non-interference basis and are not exclusive to any user. ~~These frequencies during initial attack or incident operations. They are not to be used for air-to-ground operations and are prohibited by DOI and USDA from use as a frequency during operations involving the protection of life and property.~~

- **NOTE:** When ~~you are~~ traveling between incidents, be sure to monitor for incident radio traffic in the area before using these frequencies.

National Interagency Fire Tactical Frequencies

168.0500 MHz, 168.200 MHz, 168.6000 MHz, 168.2500 MHz, 167.1375 MHz, 166.7250 MHz, 166.7750 MHz

These frequencies are used to support ground tactical operations (line of sight) on incidents.

They are not authorized for:

- Air to air communications
- Air to ground communications
- Mobile radios with more than 5 watts output power
- Base stations
- Repeater frequencies

Use of these frequencies will be coordinated between the COML and the CDO/COMC. Power output is limited to 5 watts or less.

Incident Radio Support

All ~~NIRS cache~~ NIRSC communications equipment ~~shall~~ will be returned to NIICD at NIFC immediately after the incident is turned over to the jurisdictional agency.

No cache communication equipment shall be moved from one incident to another without being first returned to NIFC for refurbishment. ~~However,~~ Equipment unused and red-sealed may be moved, if approval is given by the NIFC CDO or COMC.

Military Communications on an Incident

Military units assigned to an incident ~~already~~ have been assigned radios. Each battalion ~~is assigned has~~ 80 handheld radios. Sixteen of these radios are used by military crew liaisons. Intercrew communications within a military unit is provided by the military on their radios using their frequencies. All frequency assignments at the incident will be made by the COML in accordance with the ICS-205.

1
2 Some ~~active military and guard~~ units have aviation VHF-FM radios compatible
3 with civilian systems. Other units are adapting their aircraft for the civilian
4 radios and can be easily outfitted prior to dispatch to an incident. A limited
5 number of wiring harnesses are available at NIFC for those military aircraft that
6 ~~do not don't~~ have civilian VHF-FM capability. ~~The~~ Wiring harnesses and radios
7 will be resource ordered by the incident. The resource order will include a
8 request for trained personnel from NIICD to perform the installation of the
9 equipment. Equipment will not be sent without trained and qualified personnel
10 to install it.

11
12 **Cellular Communications/Satellite Phone Communication**
13 ~~Cellular/satellite telephones will not be used to communicate tactical operations~~
14 ~~unless they are the only means possible. Cellular/satellite telephones are not to~~
15 ~~be used for flight following in lieu of normal flight following protocols.~~

16
17 Phone communication can be used for logistical purposes.